

INTERCEDE

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Saints and Shrines

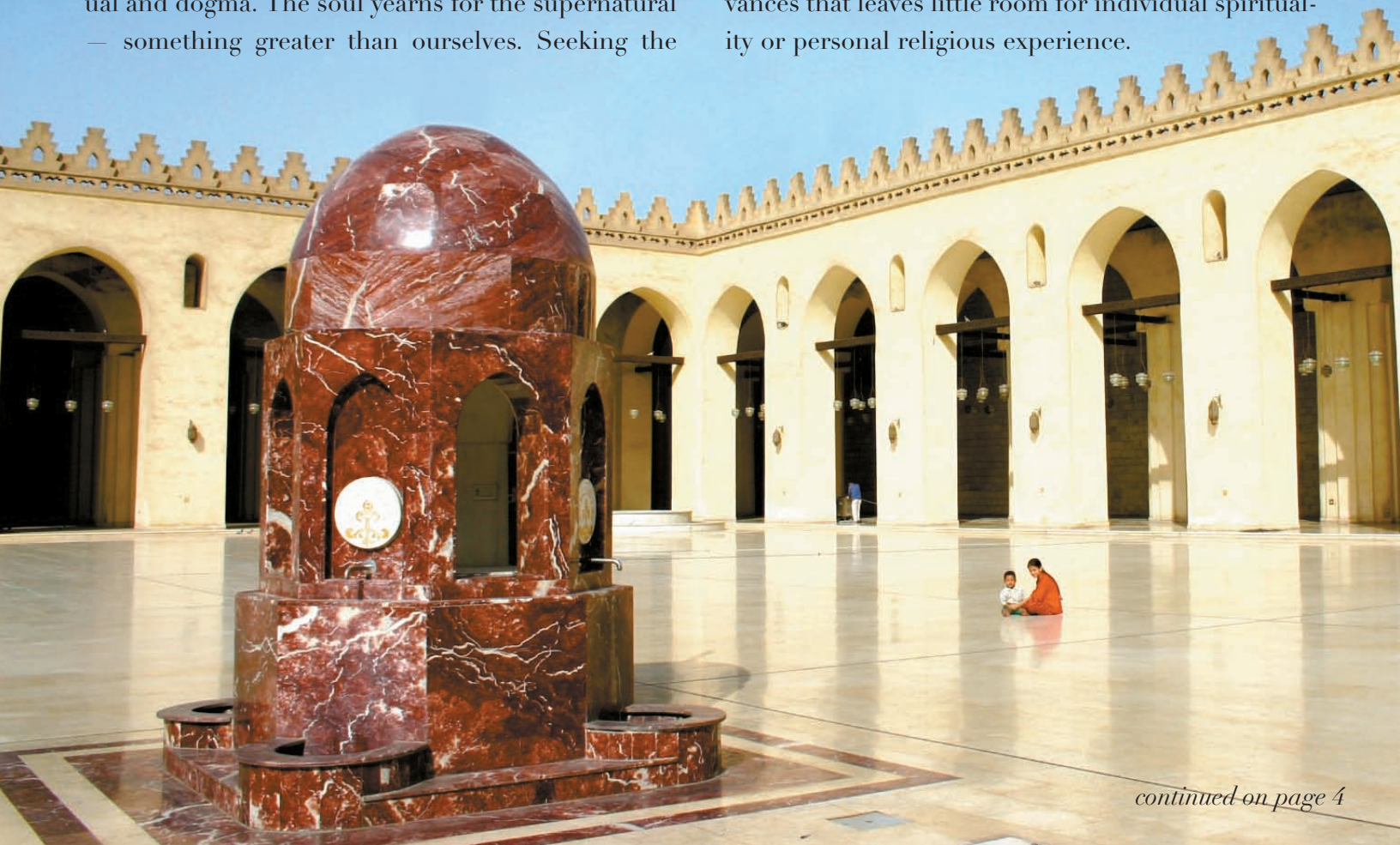
by Dale Fagerland

Popular or folk religion always claims a connection, or even loyalty to the orthodox position — the practitioners sensing no disparity in their deviance. Thus is the paradox of our Muslim friends who petition a “saint” to intercede with Allah on their behalf or on behalf of a deceased family member. Orthodox Islam teaches there is one God, and no mediator between God and man — no one can take another’s place. Yet, when we observe the behavior of ordinary Muslims around the world, we see that the *actual* practices are quite different than the *advertised* rituals.

The human spirit longs for something more than ritual and dogma. The soul yearns for the supernatural — something greater than ourselves. Seeking the

supernatural connection, millions of passionate believers flock to shrines across the Muslim world.

To the outside observer the veneration of saints in the Muslim world is almost another religion entirely growing within the realm of its host — or in spite of it. Orthodox Islam is the religion of the mosque with its prescribed times of prayer, forms of worship and fixed rituals. The *sharia*, the fundamental legal system on which the whole of daily Islamic life is based, focuses on the worship of Allah to the exclusion of all other supposed deities, clearly defined articles of belief, and an ordained practice of liturgical observances that leaves little room for individual spirituality or personal religious experience.



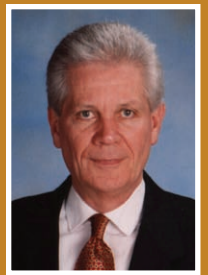
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Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14

Jim Bennett, Director
Center for
Ministry to Muslims



Nine years ago I observed a group of Shia Muslims praying in a field near the ancient site of Babylon, Iraq. They were pilgrims enroute to the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala.

Najaf is one of Shia Islam's holiest cities, second only to Mecca. It is the burial site of Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad. Shias believe Ali should have succeeded Muhammad as caliph or leader of the Muslim community. In A.D. 661, Ali was assassinated just a few miles northeast of Najaf. The Imam Ali tomb in Najaf is a primary pilgrimage destination for Shia Muslims.

Karbala is the third holiest site for Shia Muslims, after Mecca and Najaf. Karbala holds the shrine of the martyred Imam Hussein, son of Ali. Hussein's death here in A.D. 680, and the subsequent conflict over succession of the caliphate further distinguished the Shia from the Sunni sects of Islam. Shias make pilgrimages called Ashura to Karbala twice a year to commemorate Hussein's death.

It is difficult for Westerners to comprehend the power and attraction of these holy sites. Why do

the come? Pilgrims with offerings of flowers and sweet meats recite the *Fatiha* (the opening chapter of the Qur'an) before imploring Allah to grant blessings or requests. A pilgrim's child might be ill, or he could be in financial difficulties, or he might have a new business venture.

Stories abound of the wonders performed as a result of visits to tombs and shrines: Sons have been born to barren women, hazardous journeys have been completed safely, and healings have occurred.

At a South African shrine I watched as Muslims poured through the gates to make their way to a "saint's" grave. Each one bore a gift of flowers or food. A slow chant rose to a crescendo: "Baraka, baraka, baraka, ya Allah." "Blessing, blessing, blessing, oh Allah."

Read the lead article of this issue. It will give you excellent insight into the *unorthodox* side of Islam. Please engage in spiritual power encounter on behalf of Muslims who seek help at shrines and tombs. It is only the powerful name of Jesus that will set them free and provide real *baraka*.



Muslim World News



Jordan

SIX MONTHS FOR "HONOR KILLING"

A Jordanian court sentenced a man to six months in prison for the “honor killing” of his sister. The court justified the sentence, saying it was warranted due to the “state of fury” that led to the slaying. According to the court, when the woman told her brother she was five months pregnant with her former husband’s child, he began to strangle her, placing a pillow on her head and sitting on it until she suffocated. The court said the woman’s confession caused her brother to act irrationally. The court also said the woman’s “shameful behavior” deviated from the traditions of Jordanian society and harmed her family’s honor.—*AP*

Indonesia

CHURCHES THREATENED
Muslim extremists demonstrating on June 14 in West Java threat-

ened to close down churches operating in private homes, and a pastor received an anonymous letter promising to destroy his home if it is “still functioning as a church.” The protest and threats followed two attacks on churches in West Java in early June. Some 150 protestors from the Mosque Movement Front (FPM) and the Anti-Apostasy Alliance joined the mid-June march, the *Jakarta Post* reported. By law, all Indonesian church groups must have a legal worship permit — but strict terms of a Joint Ministerial Decree revised last year make it virtually impossible to obtain one of the permits. At the close of the June 14 march, FPM leader Suryana Nur Fatwa warned officials that if they failed to close down illegal churches, FPM would make its own course, and take matters into its own hands: “Every violator must stop their activities or the FPM will be forced to close them down.—*Compass*

Egypt

APOSTASY RETRIAL

Egypt’s Supreme Administrative Court quashed a previous ruling that had denied Coptic citizens the right to regain their legal Christian identity, ordering a retrial. The court based its ruling on Egypt’s civil law containing no reference to *ridda* (abandoning Islam), punishable by death under Islamic law. Ramses el-Nagar, one of the Christians’ defense attorneys, said the ruling established that the same legal principles apply to Muslim and Christian citizens alike, allowing applicants to change religious identities without having to take their cases to court. The case reflects the effect of Islamic law as the legal base in religiously plural societies. Attorney Mamdouh Ramzi asked government lawyer Mazhar Farghali what he’d do if a Muslim wished to convert to Christianity. “I would cut his throat,” Farghali replied.—*Compass*

However, within the earliest days of Islamic expansion, this obvious vacuum led to the growth of a mystical movement which absorbed elements of the faiths it displaced. *Sufism*, the mystical world of Islam, grew initially as a spiritual search for unity with Allah who was considered, not so much as a divine lawgiver as orthodox Muslims perceive him, but as the source of the soul's longing for relationship with ultimate reality.

In time *sufism* swelled to a popular movement among the masses who sought to obtain blessings (*baraka*) from, and spiritual identification with, leaders who were perceived to have obtained a special endowment from Allah. This divine gift gave certain religious leaders mediatory powers to bless, guide, protect and work miracles on behalf of their adherents. These are the "saints" of Islam of whom myriads are venerated in spite of orthodox protests that such honor is contrary to the worship of the sole and absolute Lord of the Universe, Allah himself.

Since a saint's powers do not end at death, the landscape of the Muslim world — especially in predom-

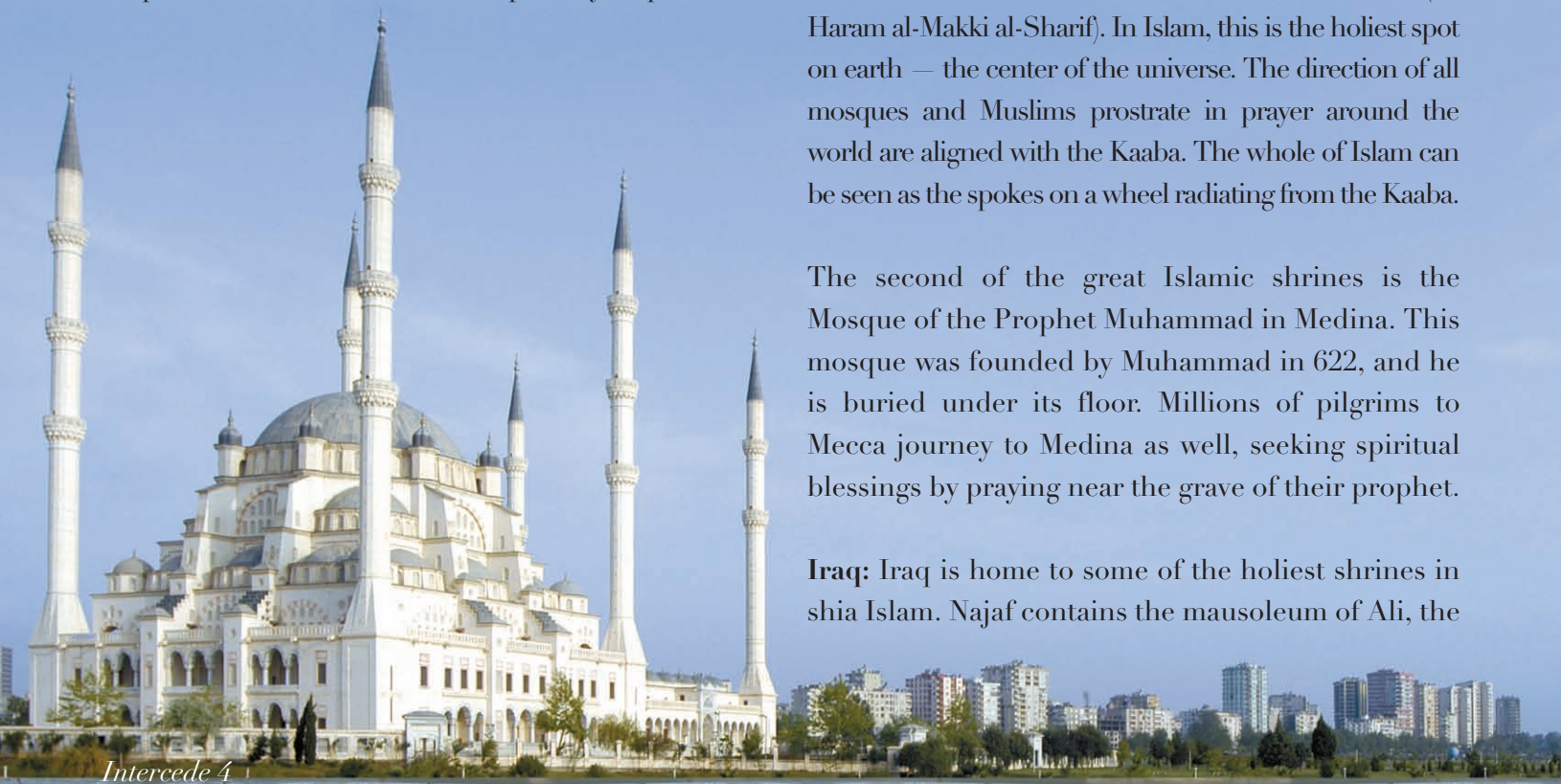
inantly shia regions as well as Southern and Central Asia — is brimming with tombs of departed saints, which have become sacred shrines. Symbolically, the tomb, erected over the grave of the departed guide, becomes a shrine which resumes the role of bridge between heaven and earth.

Indian subcontinent: Hundreds of holy graves dot the landscape of the Indian subcontinent, but Ajmer is THE holy city of Indian Muslims, the burial place of an illustrious saint. Many Indian Muslims will visit Ajmer first, then Mecca — expressing, unintentionally perhaps, priorities in terms of religious devotion. Many tombs are decorated with glistening tiled façades and domes. Some have a "pool of blessing". All the tombs are perceived as places of power by passionate believers. The desecration of a saint's grave is a reprehensible crime avenged by dreadful punishment.

Mecca and Medina: Shrines and physical places possessing *baraka* are taught in Qur'anic passages that elevate Mecca, the Kaaba containing the black stone, and Medina. The foremost shrine of Islam is the Kaaba at Mecca (al-Haram al-Makki al-Sharif). In Islam, this is the holiest spot on earth — the center of the universe. The direction of all mosques and Muslims prostrate in prayer around the world are aligned with the Kaaba. The whole of Islam can be seen as the spokes on a wheel radiating from the Kaaba.

The second of the great Islamic shrines is the Mosque of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina. This mosque was founded by Muhammad in 622, and he is buried under its floor. Millions of pilgrims to Mecca journey to Medina as well, seeking spiritual blessings by praying near the grave of their prophet.

Iraq: Iraq is home to some of the holiest shrines in shia Islam. Najaf contains the mausoleum of Ali, the



d Shrines

from page one

cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad who was also the fourth caliph. Shia Muslims do not recognize the first three caliphs, so they consider Imam Ali the first “rightly guided” caliph.

Each day, countless shia Muslims flock to Ali’s tomb to pay their respects, offer salutations, and pray to Allah seeking his intercession. Those who cannot afford the pilgrimage there are constantly praying to Allah for help in visiting the shrine of their beloved Ali. When someone goes on a pilgrimage to Najaf, they are requested to offer salutations on behalf of family and friends to pray for a particular favor and to seek Imam Ali’s intercession. A famous prayer known as “Nadey Ali” (Call Ali), is often recited.

Islamic tradition claims the tomb of Ali also holds the grave of Prophet Adam, the first prophet and man on earth, and the grave of Prophet Nuh (Noah).

Passionate pilgrims believe there is great material benefit and immense spiritual reward in visiting the grave of Imam Hussein — third caliph or imam for the shia — located in Karbala, 50 miles south of Baghdad. The Imam Hussein shrine and the adjacent shrine to his brother Abbas are the holiest shia sites of Iraq.

Some 7 million to 8 million shia Muslims perform al-Haj rituals to Karbala every year to commemorate the anniversary of Imam al-Hussein’s assassination, a pilgrimage outlawed by Saddam Hussein for 30 years. They parade, sing and beat themselves until dripping with blood to identify with the suffering and martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad 14 centuries ago.

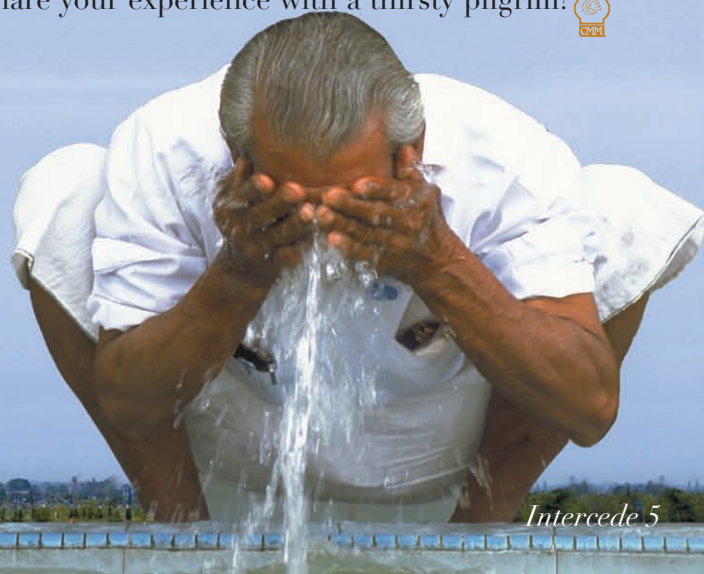
Many other countries have a saint who serves as the national patron, or one of several national patrons

— Mulay Idris I in Morocco and Abu Madyan in Algeria. From an Arabic word, the French created the name “marabout” for the cult of saints in North and West Africa. The marabout is sought after for healing, guidance, and intercession.

Opposition: The Wahabis, a super-strict orthodox sect which originated in Saudi Arabia, categorically deny the idea of saints in Islam on the grounds that it infringes on *tawhid*, rigid Islamic monotheism — the Oneness or Uniqueness of God. The Wahabi position: If one ascribes knowledge to the soothsayer and trusts him as bestowing divine guidance, that person is guilty of *shirk*, the unpardonable sin in Islam. *Shirk* is associating anything or anyone with God. *Shirk* is idolatry, ascribing plurality to the Deity — a sin that God will never forgive.

Humans are naturally religious. Ecclesiastes says that God has put the thought of eternity upon man’s heart. But human nature cannot survive on legalistic duties and intellectual disciplines alone. The human spirit yearns to experience God at the level of the heart. We witness our Muslim friends searching for more than orthodox religion provides.

Visiting the shrine of a saint will produce no more lasting satisfaction than seeking to drink from a broken cistern that cannot hold water. If you have drunk from the Spring of Living Water, will you share your experience with a thirsty pilgrim?



Country Focus

Mauritania

Population: 2.9 million

Religions: Muslim 99.7%, Christian 0.16%

Official Language: (Hassaniya) Arabic

Peoples: Arabic 70%, Black African 28.8%

Unreached People Group

Tukolor

Location: southern Mauritania

Population: 190,000 in Mauritania

Religion: Muslim (Sunni) 99.9%

Language: Tukolor (Pulaar)

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania is located on the northwestern coast of Africa. The land is entirely desert except for the north bank of the Senegal River on the southern border.

An unrelenting drought for many years has devastated the country, made Mauritania one of the world's poorest countries, and provoked inter-ethnic violence over limited water and usable land. Independence from France in 1960 was followed by an endless succession of military coups. In 1992 a civilian government was appointed. Diplomatic ties with Israel have resulted in increased internal and external opposition to the government in 2000.

There is no freedom for conversion to another religion and the sentence for apostasy is death—though this sentence has not been carried out in recent years. Proselytism is illegal.

There are approximately 1.1 million Tukolor living in West Africa. While most of them live in Senegal, they comprise 7 percent of Mauritania's population. The Tukolor are thought to have descended from the Fulani, Wolof, or Serer tribes. The Tukolor are known by many names, including Pulaar, Haal Pulaar, and Torobe. They've retained their respective languages and many are fluent in Arabic.

Most of the Tukolor live a rural lifestyle — raising livestock and fishing. A rising population and an unequal distribution of land have resulted in the emigration of large numbers of Tukolor to the cities in search of better job opportunities.



Information from Operation World, 2001 edition and Bethany World Prayer Center's "The Unreached Peoples Prayer Profiles."

Please pray...

...the Holy Spirit will anoint the Gospel as it goes forth via radio among the Tukolor.

...God will save key Tukolor leaders who will share the love of Jesus with their own people.

...that Mauritians who have scattered through West Africa will be evangelized by all means.



JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*PRAYING FOR MUSLIMS
AROUND THE WORLD!*



Friday, September 7, 2007. Please pray

...for the salvation of 25,000 Comorian Muslims living in France.

...for Christian prisoners held in Eritrea. Their number is now estimated to be over 2,000.

...for Coptic apostates in Egypt. A major legal ruling is expected soon on the conversion of Muslims to Christianity.

Friday, September 14, 2007. Please pray

...for Muslims in Libya. Pray that the Lord would continue to use Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) to reach Muslims with the love of Christ.

...for seeking Muslims in Saudi Arabia. Pray that despite strident governmental oppression, Muslims will still receive witness of Jesus Christ.

...for thousands of Arabs living in South America. Pray that the Latin American Church will seize the unprecedented opportunity for ministry to Muslims.

Friday, September 21, 2007. Please pray

...for the Muslims of Afghanistan. The political situation is once again unstable — with most analysts suspecting the dreaded Taliban to be in a state of dormancy.

...that 900,000 (four percent of the total Canadian population) Muslims living in Canada will hear the Gospel.

...for house churches in Iran. These underground believers often risk financial loss, imprisonment, and death.

Friday, September 28, 2007. Please pray

...for continued progress in Qatar. The first building specifically designated as a church is under construction.

...for Pakistani evangelists beaten by a mob after distributing tracts at a festival.

...that God will protect Indonesian house churches. They are under increasing scrutiny and pressure from Muslim protestors.

***I URGE, THEN, FIRST OF ALL THAT REQUESTS, PRAYERS, INTERCESSION AND
THANKSGIVING BE MADE FOR EVERYONE. —1 TIMOTHY 2:1, NIV***



JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*PRAYING FOR MUSLIMS
AROUND THE WORLD!*



Friday, October 5, 2007. Please pray

...for God's love to reach hundreds of thousands of children in Muslim madrassas (Qur'anic schools). These precious children daily spend long hours of indoctrination through rote memorization of the Qur'an, usually reciting the verses in Arabic, a language most will never even understand.

...for MBBs in Chechnya. Muslim Chechens cannot change their religion publicly.

...for the country of Thailand. Fighting between the Thai government and Muslim insurgents has already resulted in several thousand deaths.

Friday, October 12, 2007. Please pray

...that mature and vibrant churches will be planted among Muslims in Africa.

...for the potential peace deal in Sudan. The Darfur conflict is threatening to surge again.

...for the forgotten Christian community of Somalia. MBBs face grave danger and face tremendous risks.

Friday, October 19, 2007. Please pray

...for Christian teachers working in the Palestinian West Bank. May doors open for them to share the love of Jesus.

...for a new church for Russian converts from Islam, growing in a undisclosed city in Russia.

...for persecuted MBBs who don't have a surrounding community of believers to help and encourage them.

Friday, October 26, 2007. Please pray

...for young believers in Senegal to be filled with wisdom and the vision to share the Gospel with friends and neighbors.

...for the millions of Muslims tuning in to Christian programs every day. Pray that God will minister to each through the different types of programs.

...for efforts to bring the gospel to the 200,000 Muslim immigrants in Japan.